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SECOND PART

THE LIFE OF THE FAMILY AND OF THE VILLAGE

621/592 Having followed a man and a woman from the beginning to the end of their existence, I now come to the Life of the Family and of the Village. Both subjects are in close connexion. As a rule, a village is but a family composed of the headman, the father, his wives, his children and the old folk who depend upon him; but in many cases his younger brothers live with him, sometimes a son-in-law, or even a stranger, and all these inmates compose the village, *muti* (1). In the first chapter we shall consider the family itself, its constitution, the system of relationship, and in the second, the village, the concrete embodiment of the family, its foundation, its main laws and the respective occupations of its members.

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF THE FAMILY

121/601 The kinship system of the Thongas and, I suppose, of all the Bantus is widely different from ours, and greatly surprises the

(1) Native villages are generally called *kraals* by South African colonists. This expression comes from the Portuguese word *curral* which means properly stable. I shall employ it to designate the enclosure where oxen are kept, the cattle-kraal, but it does not seem right to apply it to the *muti* which is a *village*, however small and poor it may be. The Portuguese call native villages *povoação*.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF THE VILLAGE.

621/596 The Thonga village (muti) is not a hap-hazard agglomeration of people. It is a social organism with a well-defined construction and is regulated by strict laws. After all, it is merely an enlarged family: the headman and the old people who have fallen to his charge, his wives, his younger brothers and their wives, his married sons, his unmarried sons and daughters. All these people form a community whose life it is most interesting to study.

Let us describe its outward appearance, the laws of its "foundation" and "moving", its organisation under the headman, the doings of its different members and the rules of etiquette which are observed. While our first chapter gave us an insight into the internal constitution of the Thonga family, this will show us how the social organism, which is at the base of all the tribal life, manifests itself outwardly in the village.

A. THE THONGA VILLAGE.

361 We have already caught a glimpse of it, from the inside, through the eyes of the headman Gidja (p. 128). Now we enter it from outside, as foreigners, with the curiosity of the ethnographer and the philosophical interests of the sociologist.

The Thonga villages present a remarquable uniformity all through the tribe. The same laws regulate their construction in the Ronga as in the Northern clans. Let us suppose that we have left Lourenço Marques and reached the Mabota and Nondwane

361 596 264 476 he or she has finished the meal, will have eaten a little of all that has been cooked on all the fires. It is impossible to imagine a more perfect communism than this as regards food! I myself witnessed this custom of the evening meal in Spoon Libombo's village in Rikatla. Amongst the inhabitants of the kraal there were two blind male adults, the wife of one of them being half blind herself ; the wife of the other was an old woman who could hardly till a few square yards of mealies and ground-nuts, and keep the birds and the hens away from them. Spoon's wife and the wife of another man of the village alone were healthy and able to work normally. So the whole burden rested on their shoulders, as the share the other women could take in the feeding of the men was necessarily small. However I never heard Spoon grumble ; being the headman, he made it a point of honour that all the people dwelling with him should have enough to eat. Everybody who has lived with South African Natives has admired their wonderful readiness to share any food they may have with those present. Even children are much superior in this respect to White children. I attribute this virtue to the community of food which reigns in the Bantu village, and which is certainly one of the most attractive features of Kafir socialism. Village life has not taught the Thongas merely bad habits.

B. MOVING A VILLAGE AND FOUNDING A NEW ONE.

621 754 596 Large kraals similar to the one shown in our illustration were more numerous in former times than now. It is rare to meet with such a number of huts and so many people under one headman. Why ? Because, say my informants, the superstition of witchcraft has considerably increased in later times. Suppose the wife of one of the younger brothers should [787] die ; the divinatory bones reveal that this death is due to a witch ; they go so far as to designate one of the wives of the headman as guilty. No common life is any longer possible. The widower will move elsewhere and build a fence around his

621 754 596 own huts to protect them against would-be-witches. In this way many villages are broken up by fear of witchcraft. Generally speaking the Thonga village cannot long remain of any considerable size ; it tends to fall to pieces.

But there are other causes which may destroy the village and the idyllic life of the small community. The death of the headman, and lightning striking the village, are the two main causes which may bring about this event.

765 596 621 787 *Death of the headman.* There is a mystic tie between this man and the social organism which is under him. Should he die, the village dies also... It is not abandoned at once. The whole year of mourning will elapse before the moving. But as soon as the widows and property have been distributed, the successor of the deceased will go and found his own village and the old one will remain a ruin (rumbi). Should any one else die, his hut will merely be thrown into the bush and the village will not be abandoned. But should these deaths increase, then the divinatory bones may order the place to be deserted, as it is defiled and dangerous.

821 756 787 621 If *lightning* strikes the hubo, it is a very bad omen. The medicine man who has the power to "treat the place struck by lightning" is called in. Should he be able to exhume from the ground the mysterious bird which causes lightning, or at least the coagulated urine which it has deposited, and which is called Heaven (See Part VI), the people are allowed to stay. But if he does not discover it deep down in the soil, the village must move, as the presence of the mysterious power of Heaven inside the circle of huts would bring disaster. This is a taboo.

621 787 596 Another cause of moving is the *exhaustion of the gardens.* When the fields are "tired" (karala) and do not produce sufficient food for the inhabitants, they leave the place and look for pastures new. In that case the bones will be consulted. Sometimes, even, the village may be transported elsewhere for the sole reason that the people are tired of the place and want to change. If the bones confirm their wishes, they will move.

621 596 *The founding of a new village* is the occasion of most interesting and characteristic rites, which afford us a new insight into the

621 596 nature of that social unit, the Thonga *muti*. I shall give the sequence of these rites first in the Northern clans, according to the description of Viguet, and secondly amongst the Ba-Ronga, according to Mboza.

I. *In the Northern clans.*

621 787 784 1) The headman goes first to examine some spots where he would like to build. He *breaks small twigs* from various trees and brings them home.

833 2) The bones are consulted and help in *making a choice*. The twigs are placed on a mat one after the other. When the stone of the *kanye* (see Part VI) falls in a certain way in front of one of the twigs, this shows that the tree from which it has been broken is the one near which the hut of the headman must be built.

3) Building material is collected. When everything is ready to proceed to the construction of the huts, the headman goes with his principal wife to the spot chosen. They leave the old village for ever ; they must not return to it any more. In the evening they have *sexual relations* in the new place and in the morning they tie together some tufts of living grass. Next day all the people of the old village must come and step upon this grass. This rite is called to *tie the village* (boha muti).

621 595 784 834 4) Then begins the period, of about one month, called *buhlapfa*, time of moving, which has its laws. Two great taboos dominate it : 1) Sexual relations are absolutely prohibited. Should any one transgress this law, he has sinned gravely against the headman ; he has stolen the village (yiba muti). The headman will be ill, perhaps paralysed. The guilty woman will also be punished : she will not be able to bear children again ; she will be "tied by the village" (bohiwa hi muti). The culprits have "crossed the way of the master of the village" (tjemakanya). Strange to say, the headman himself is bound by this law. He must have no relations *with his younger wives*, because the village belongs to the principal spouse. Should such a transgression be discovered, the work

595 515 784 821 621 342 482 831 462

of building will be stopped at once and the little community will find another place to move! Moreover the guilty woman will have to ask the principal wife for forgiveness. 2) A second great taboo is this : — No one must wash his body during the whole "buhlapfa", as this might cause the rain to fall and it would interfere with the building operations.

5) The building of the huts begins immediately, each man making the circular wall first. When all the walls are ready,

Carrying a roof.

the *roofs are carried* from the old village to the new by all the men together. They lift each roof on to their shoulders, after having removed the old grass, and go out of the village, not by the main entrance, but by one of the back gates which has been widened for the purpose. A broad road has been prepared through the bush. They follow it, marching as fast as they can, and singing the obscene songs which are reserved for special occasions (see Part VI). In these they insult the women who accompany them, carrying the baskets, the mortars, the pestles. "The village is broken in pieces, so are the ordinary laws. The insults which are taboo are now allowed" (Mboza). This suspension of morality in speech is only allowed on the day when roofs are carried to the new village. Some days later, again, the women will take their revenge when they smear the floor of the huts ; then they too will sing their songs, insulting the men. But

621 all this is done in fun. It is a great day of rejoicing for the
831 "tinamu", who tease each other as much as they like. A man may be wanting in respect even to his great mukonwana on these days!

621 6) When the huts are ready, the *fence* is built. The family
756 doctor is summoned. The medicine man throws leaves or
351 stones treated with his drugs along the circular line, where the
789 headman intends to place the branches which will form the future fence of the village. This being done, the men erect the fence.

7) Special precautions are taken for *the main entrance*. Poles are erected on both sides, but before they are put in place, the doctor pours medicine into the holes in the ground and also smears the poles with it at the bottom and at the top. Mankhelu used to bury a black stone, taken out of the river, at the gate. This stone had also been smeared with drugs. "In this way, I prevent enemies from entering. Those who come to try their charms against us (ku hi ringa hi maringo) will be attacked by disease and go and die in their houses."

783 8) The building is finished. Nothing remains to be done
834 but to *ripen the village* (wupfisa muti). Men and women assemble
621 in two separate groups and ask each other if they have been continent during the whole "buhlapfa". If one of them confesses to having sinned, he has stolen the village from the headman; the whole work is spoiled and must be recommenced elsewhere. If all the members of the community have behaved well, they proceed to a purifying ceremony exactly similar to the *hlamba ndjaka* which takes place during the mourning ceremonies. Each couple has sexual relations according to a fixed order of precedence, one every night, and they all go to trample on the spot where the women wash their hands. The principal wife is the last to perform these rites.

621 9) Then comes the *drawing to himself of the village by the headman*
595 (kokotela muti). At dawn, after the night when she has had her ritual sexual relations with the headman, his principal wife takes his shield and his assagais and stands at the main entrance, everyone being present. Outside is a thorny branch prepared for the occasion. In her martial attire, she drags this branch to the entrance and closes it.

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621 10) Having closed the village in this way, she *performs a sacrifice*.
595 She sips a mouthful of water from a tumbler, spitting out a
782 portion of it (phahla) towards the people ; then she washes her hands, and throws a little of the water towards them in order *to give them* the village. This act is accompanied by the following words : "Be not tied by the village! Bring forth children ; live and be happy and get everything. You gods, see! I have no bitterness in my heart. It is pure. I was angry because my husband abandoned me, he said I was not his wife ; he loved his younger wives. Now, this is finished in my heart. We shall have friendly relations together..." The prayer being concluded, the headman goes to the main entrance, pushes the thorny branch aside, and opens the village.

621 11) The last act is the *khangula*, the *inauguration ceremony*.
574 Beer is prepared, neighbours are invited and they all drink together, the neighbours coming *to see the new village* (ku bona muti).

As regards the old one, when the moving has been accomplished through the back door widened for the purpose, one of the inhabitants closes the main entrance with a branch. Hence comes the expression which is applied to a village all of whose inmates have died, and which has, on that account, disappeared : "Those people have all died and there was not even one left to close the gate."

II. *In the Ba-Ronga Clans.*

621 The sequence of rites for the removal of a village is very
787 much the same as in the Northern clans.
824 1) The headman examines some spots and consults the bones :
765 "Must I built at such and such a tree ?"

2) When the tree has been designated, he goes to it and places at its foot his furniture (nyundju) and his instrument of worship, his altar, (a pot, a jar, see Part VI). The altar may be placed at the main entrance later on, if the bones so order it. As already mentioned, there will be a mystic relation between him and that tree. He must never cut it down. If any of the branches should be

621 troublesome and he should wish to remove them, he must ask
824 some one else to do it. On the day of his death, or rather when
765 his hut is crushed down, a branch of that tree will be put on the place where the threshhold was, and another used to close the main entrance of the village, a new entrance being then made through the fence and used as the gate during the rest of the mourning period.

621 3) He has sexual relations on the new spot on the first night
833 with his principal wife ; in this way he will *fuya muri*, viz. "possess this tree," and also *fuya muti*, "possess the village." The Ronga *fuya* corresponds here also to the *boha* of the Northern clans (Compare boha puri and fuya ñwana, page 57). If someone precedes him in sexual intercourse, he is guilty ; he has "preceded the village" (rangela muti). By this act the headman has definitely left the old village. The others can go back to it to fetch what remains ; for him it is taboo.

621 4) The same day, all the inhabitants come and move all the
831 roofs, if it is possible to do this in one day. One hut is rapidly
834 built to afford shelter to the inhabitants, in case of rain. The
342 first roof to be transported is that of the hut of the principal wife. This is also done to the accompaniment of obscene songs. These songs are not allowed when only one hut is transported, which may happen when some one goes to live in another village. It is definitely a custom which goes with the moving of a whole village.

5) The following day two huts are erected, one for the men, the other for the women, because they must not sleep together. "They are still in the bush ; it is buhlapfa ; the village is not yet firm." Those who break this law cause injury to the headman. The bones will soon reveal that "he has been preceded as regards the village ; (a rangeliwile muti)." All the huts are smeared twice ; the women begin to sleep in them, but not the men. The fence and the main entrance must first be prepared.

621 6) The *main entrance* (mharana). The men pull up the grass
789 all the way from the back hut to the place where the main entrance must be, so as to make a road all through the village. All the dried plants weeded out during this operation are carefully

621 789 824 gathered in a heap. The headman, on the advice of the medicine man, cuts from certain very vigorous trees such as the nkanye and the ntjondjo, two branches which can live when transplanted. He digs holes on both sides of the entrance and puts the branches into them. Across the gateway, he buries a third branch of the ntjopfa tree, "which causes oblivion" (p. 58): this will be smeared with special drugs in order to increase its efficacy ; it is intended to prevent the baloyi, witches and people speaking bad words. (lit "with bad lips"), from thinking about the village and spoiling it.

621 833 789 7) On the evening of that day, the headman and his principal wife have intercourse in their hut and, at dawn, while it is still dark, they go and wash their hands at the main entrance. Mboza does not say that all the other couples must do the same, or trample on the spot. In Nondwane this is sufficient and the rite does not apply to the other couples. But at Manyisa, midway between Lourenço Marques and Khosen, where the Djonga customs are sometimes met with, all the couples must have relations, one after the other, according to order of precedence. It is deemed so important to keep the due order in this "giving to each other the right of resuming sexual life" that, should an elder brother have been absent when the village moved, on his return he must undergo a special treatment in a neighbouring village, during a few days, to avoid any bad consequences resulting from having been unlawfully "preceded" (rangeliwa).

621 789 782 756 8) After the night during which this sexual rite has taken place, at daybreak, all the dried grass is piled in front of the main hut and burnt ritually. The headman throws into the fire a special medicinal pill in order to *give the village over* to his people (nyiketa muti). They all warm their bodies at the blaze, and go and set fire to all the other heaps of dried grass which they made when clearing the soil.

9) The medicine man comes on that same day, and sprinkles the fence with his drugs, in order to protect the village against bush fires, wizards and disease. He walks all round the fence saying : "Happy village! May misfortune not enter here! These are my drugs!" — He starts from one of the poles of the main

621 entrance and finishes his walk at the other, hanging upon it the
789 branch with which he has been sprinkling.

10) Then he sacrifices a hen. A young man accompanying
782 him cuts its throat ; the doctor plucks some feathers from the
756 neck, sacrifices in the ordinary way and invokes his gods : "You used to treat villages (daha miti) with these drugs and I do the same. I do not act of my own wisdom ; you have given it to me. Bless this place, etc." . Then he plucks a feather from the hen's right wing, and suspends it at the main entrance or in the main hut, inside, over the door, according to the directions given by the bones. This is the *shirungulo* (see Part VI) and the act is called : "to tie the village" (tjimba muti).

621 Amongst the Rongas, there are some other *buhlapfa taboos*. It
372 is not allowable to light any fire in a village until it is completely
784 built. During the whole building period, cooking is done outside
789 the fence ; crushing mealies in the mortars and dancing are also prohibited. Whistling (ku ba noti) is forbidden, as it might call
198 the wizards inside the village before it has been protected by the charms.

621 If a man has many wives, he may build a second village for
595 himself and establish one of them there. A grown-up son, the son of the woman, will represent the headman in that village, but the law of "tying the village" will also be observed in this case. The headman will perform the act with this woman, and preside at the burning of the dried grass and of the medicinal pill, by which he *gives* the village to the inhabitants.

When a younger brother, or a son, leaves the headman and founds a village for himself (tihambela muti), he does it according to the same laws as those observed at the regular moving of a village.

III. *Some remarks on the rules of moving.*

621 Let us now analyse the two parallel sequences of rites which we have just described, and which complete each other. It is easy to discover amongst them three series of rites, social, protective and passage rites.

621 1) *Social rites.* The muti, as we have seen, is a little organised
596 community having its own laws, amongst which the most important
833 seems to be the law of hierarchy. The elder brother is the undisputed
768 master and no one can supersede him. He is the owner of the village. No one must "steal it" from him. Should any one do so, the whole community would suffer and no children would be born ; the life of the organism would be deeply affected. That is the reason why the headman must go first with his principal wife to have relations with her in the new village, and thus *take possession* of it or *tie* it. For this same reason, when the headman dies, the village *must* move. It is taboo to remain in it. Until the inheritance has been distributed, it is still *his home* (kwa kwe) ; but as soon as this ceremony has taken place, the villagers must go away, and close the door with a thorny branch. The part played by the
621 principal wife in all these ceremonies is most remarkable. It is
595 absolutely imperative that the headman should "tie the village" with her,
562 and not with another of his spouses. Should she be very old, the law
768 must be observed all the same ; should she be ill, and unable to have sexual
764 relations, the village simply cannot be moved. In the Northern clans we see her taking the shield and the assagai, closing the village and "giving it" to the inmates, even performing a sacrifice and praying to the gods. It is very rare to see a woman presiding at a public religious ceremony ; but she is the owner of the village as well as the headman. Moving is imperative when she dies as well as after the death of the headman. The main gate must also be closed and a new entrance made in the fence to be used during the year of mourning ; in the case of her death, this opening must be made on the left of the regular *mharana*, whilst, when the husband dies, it is made on the right side ; just as in the hut, when the corpse is removed for burial. (See page 138.)

351 2) *Protective rites.* These are those which concern the fence. This
789 fence does not afford material protection. The branches dry up very
621 soon and, in the case of a bush-fire, for instance, they would do more harm than good. It is a spiritual protection, a barrier of charms, of magic influences, to prevent the entrance of wizards and of all the hostile powers of the bush. We shall understand this better when treating of witchcraft superstitions. (Part VI.)

182 3) *Passage rites.* The reader will have been surprised to observe
621 amongst the ceremonies of the moving of villages, many features
829 which we have already met with in the circumcision school, or in the mourning customs. At first sight there seems to be no relation whatever between the moving of a village, the initiation of boys and the

182 mourning over the dead. The inner connexion existing between these
621 three events is that, in all of them, there is a passage. Hence the
783 resemblance of the rites. This striking similarity is, to my mind, the
829 best proof that the passage rites constitute a peculiar category. When a headman has decided to move, he leaves his old kraal, he *separates* from it, not by the ordinary gate, but by a special opening made at the back of the village. He is not allowed to return to it again. Then, for him and for all his people, begins a *marginal period* of one month or more, the buhlapfa (notice the prefix *bu* which indicates a period here, as in busahana page 42). We see the village, during these few weeks, put beyond the pale of society. The ordinary laws are suspended, (licencious songs), and many special taboos are enforced (prohibition of sexual relations, fire taboo, water taboo, etc.), just as in the period of mourning; at last the village returns to the ordinary course of life by a final act of purification, the mysterious *hlamba ndjaka*, which seems to be the most powerful means of cleansing the collective life. This last ceremony shows that, here, the marginal period has been instituted on account of the uncleaness, the impurity of the old village. Let us remember that in most cases the village has been moved on account of death! All the adult members of the social organism take part in the cleansing (at least in the Northern clans) and so the village begins a new and purified life. No one can deny the deep significance of all these rites and the mystic conception of the Thonga village.

C. THE HEADMAN AND THE ORGANISATION OF THE VILLAGE.

596 Each village thus possesses its superior (hosi), its master. He
576 is called *munumzane* or *numzane*, a curious expression which is
621 also employed in Zulu ; it means owner of a kraal, gentleman,
618 and is often used in saluting grown up men. We have seen the mystic relation between the headman and his *muti*. The village, the muti, is the primitive social organism. The clan (tiko), which is the gathering of all the *miti*, reproduces all the features of the
622 village life on a large scale. So the *numzane* corresponds to the
596 *hosi*, chief of the tribe. Both certainly possess great authority,

782 1) *Individual and family offerings* — those which concern a man or his family alone, — and *national offerings* — those which concern the whole clan.

2) The *simple offerings* called *gandjela*, and the *sacramental ones*, accompanied by the famous *tsu* which constitutes them a *hahla* (Ro.) or a *phahla* (Dj.).

3) Offerings attended with *bloodshed*, and those where no victim is killed.

4) The *regular offerings*, made at certain dates, or in connection with definite events in the life of the family or of the clan, and those made in *special* circumstances.

a) *Individual and Family Offerings.*

Simple Offerings (Gandjela).

782 778 Here the ritual is reduced to its minimum. The offering is made by the father of the family at the gandjelo, the altar, or place of worship. This is, as has already been pointed out, a little pot, placed at the right side of the entrance to the village, or under the tree designated by the bones (I. p. 320) (1). In some cases, especially if the headman is a medicine-man or magician, the gandjelo consists of a forked branch planted in the ground, either inside his hut, or in the very middle of the square. Such was the case in the village of Mankhelu (See illustration I. p. 5). His gandjelo was a branch of *nkonola* (or *nkonono*); this tree, the *mpfilu* and *shisalala* are the only trees which are used for the purpose. He had removed the bark in some places, and smeared the stems with his black powders, so that there were two dark rings of about 3 inches wide on the branch. A lot of curious things were to be seen hanging from the lateral branches : bags

621 778 782 (1) If there are people of different clans inhabiting the same village owing to the fact that foreigners have "kondza" i. e, have put themselves under the authority of the headman (I. p. 433), there will be a central gandjelo, the altar of the master of the village, at the foot of the sacred tree where offerings will be made for himself and his relatives; but people of the other clans will have their own altars which will be placed near the main entrance, on the spot where the representatives of each of these clans assemble when discussing their own affairs.